



PHOTO BY PAULA MERRITT / THE MERIDIAN STAR

YELLOW RIBBONS OF HONOR

Gerard Hills is a senior at Meridian High School. He enjoys singing, composing music, playing instruments, dancing and writing. This is his message to U.S. troops serving overseas: "I am writing you all to let you know how wonderful I think you are. So, maybe this letter may not mean much to you because you don't even know who I am, but you all mean a great deal to me because you have affected my life. I walk outside to the mailbox, and there it is — that big yellow ribbon on the back of someone's car. I ride to school and there it is again, and this time on a girl's wrist for her brother who has gone off to war. Even though you are not here physically, you are here spiritually. You are kept alive through the spirits of all Americans. So, I wear the ribbon close to my heart because you are a part of the reason why my heart has the freedom to beat, to live, to love and, most of all, to give. So, with this letter I am giving back to you the thanks for all the things that you are doing in Iraq. On behalf of the United States of America, I would like to say, 'We love you, we miss you, stay strong — and come home soon.'"

SPEAK UP

Here's how these Lauderdale County residents answered the question, "Who would you miss most if you had to serve in Iraq?"

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| "I would miss my mother." | Brandi Scarbrough, 16 |
| "I would miss my wife." | Carl Reed Lummus, 71 |
| "I would miss my husband." | Joanne Lummus, 66 |
| "I would miss my church family." | Megan McMullen, 15 |
| "I would miss my mom." | Josh Gwinn, 16 |
| "I would miss my church." | Abby Havard, 16 |
| "I would miss my family." | Cynthia Wilson, 43 |
| "I would miss my friends." | Kelsey Wilson, 12 |

Andrea Wilson, a sophomore at Southeast Lauderdale High School, compiled this Speak Up question. Her parents are Steve and Cynthia Wilson and she has a sister, Kelsey. Andrea plays softball for Southeast, and wants to pursue a career in the medical field.

Bragging rights

"I want to brag on Staff Sgt. Joe Allen Gambill of the Mississippi Army National Guard's 150th Combat Engineer Battalion. He is a wonderful father to his four children. All he does is for his children. Before he was mobilized, he was a full-time student at Mississippi State University and he has one more year before he gets his bachelor's degree.

"When he was mobilized, he went without a fuss because he wanted a safe future for his children. He will do his job and he keeps in contact with his children even though miles separate them. He is also a thoughtful and kind person to those who are around him."

Mary Ann Luna, Meridian

Lt. Col. Rick Berryhill of the Mississippi Air National Guard's 186th Air Refueling Wing flies the C-26 counter-drug aircraft, and was deployed to South America last year. His daughter, Louise Berryhill, is a third-grader at Newton County Elementary School. Here is what she said about her father:

"My Dad helps people every day. My Dad flies an airplane for the Mississippi Air National Guard ... I am proud that

my Dad has been a soldier for 17 years. As a civilian, my Dad is a full-time parent and likes to work on our farm."

Louise Berryhill, Union



Berryhill

"I want to brag on Sgt. Bobby Dale Viverette of the Mississippi Army National Guard's 150th Combat Engineer Battalion.

"Being a mother, you always worry about your children, no matter their age. Dale is 48 years old. I pray for him and the guys he is with daily. I have asked many people across the country to keep them in their prayers also. We cannot imagine what they go through each day.

"Dale is so brave to leave his family and his country in order to protect us here at home. He went into the National Guard mainly to supplement his income and has served for 19 years. Dale was trying so hard to get his 20 years in and

got caught up in this war. He is serving in Iraq so that our country can remain a free nation. He was ready and willing to do his part."

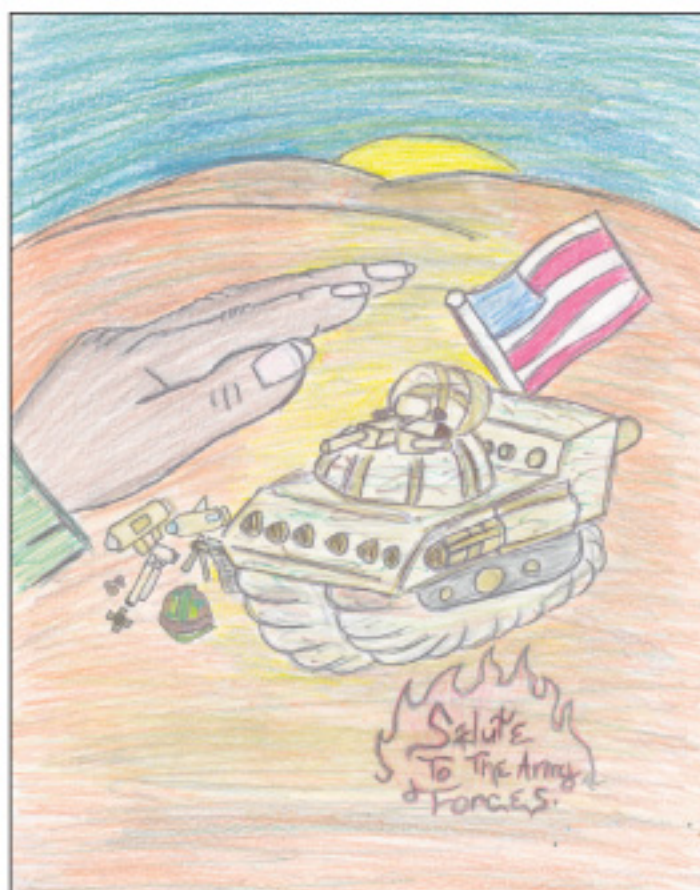
Elise Hagan, Union

"One of our family's greatest blessings is our son, Sgt. Clifford 'Skip' Stamper Jr. Before Skip was called to active service, he attended East Central Community College. He was working part-time for the Movie Gallery and La-Z-Boy, and wants to work full time at La-Z-Boy when he gets back. Skip was 24 on Feb. 3.

"On Jan. 13, he and other members of the Mississippi Army National Guard's 155th Brigade stationed at Camp Shelby were deployed to Iraq.

"We are proud that Skip is one of the brave and courageous soldiers fighting for Iraqi freedom. Many people take for granted the blessing and freedom we enjoy each day in America. We ask that you take a moment to pray for them and all soldiers while they are far from home helping others achieve some of the freedoms Americans enjoy."

Sandra and Cliff Stamper, Newton



INSPIRED TO JOIN JROTC

Northwest Junior High School art students were asked to draw pictures to salute U.S. troops. Here's what Pierre Smith, a ninth-grader, said about his drawing: "When I heard that we had to do something to salute the military, I immediately began drawing. My idea of the hand was me saluting to the military and those who are fighting for us. The tank and weapons were for the battles and loss of soldiers. Then there was a flag representing the USA. Thank you for sacrificing your life, time, even family and friends. You're fighting for everyone's life has inspired me to join the Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps and wear my uniform supporting you. Good luck and God bless you."

ILLUSTRATION BY PIERRE SMITH